

U.S. Military Academy - Cadet Chapel

(Old Cadet Chapel)

Just north of the junction of Washington and Rugar

Roads at the main entrance to the USMA Cemetery

U.S. Military Academy

West Point

Orange County

New York

HABS No. NY-5708-7

HABS

NY,

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey

National Park Service

Department of the Interior

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HABS
NY
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY - CADET CHAPEL
(OLD CADET CHAPEL)

LOCATION: Just north of the juncture of Washington and Ruger Roads
at the main entrance to the U.S.M.A. Cemetery, U.S.
Military Academy, West Point, Orange County, New York

USGS, West Point Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 18.586320.4583220.

PRESENT OWNER
AND OCCUPANT: U.S. Military Academy, Department of the Army

PRESENT USE: Cadet Chapel, Cemetery Chapel

SIGNIFICANCE: The Cadet Chapel is one of the oldest surviving structures
at West Point. It is an excellent example of a Greek
Revival building in that phase of the Academy's physical
development.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1834-36. The building's cornerstone is dated 1837, which is the date given in Williams' Facilities Report, but other evidence indicates that it was completed by 1836. Two U.S.M.A. documents cited in Grashof's "Building Analysis and Preservation Guidelines," HABS No. NY-5708, indicate that the cornerstone was laid in 1834 and that services were being held in 1836.
2. Architect: Unknown; possibly Major Richard Delafield.
3. Original and subsequent owners: U.S. Military Academy, Department of the Army.
4. Builders: Presumably Post Quartermaster's office
5. Original plans and construction: In 1910 the Chapel was moved from its original site in the Academic Area to its present location in the cemetery. In its original location, it was situated between the old Library and the old Academic Building and faced north toward the Plain. Funds for construction totaled \$14,753 (Grashof, Record Series #280). The exterior appears to have remained unaltered while minor changes have taken place on the interior. The original interior did not initially have the commemorative plaques that now occupy its walls. One of the major differences between the early and the present interior is the extensive stenciling of the walls and cornice which can be seen in 1908 photographs; it is unknown whether this was original to the building or added later in the nineteenth century. By as early as 1910 two windows (the second windows from the altar) were filled and used as trophy cases.

6. Alteration and additions: Historic photographs indicate that relatively few alterations have taken place. Although probably part of the original decorative design scheme, the mural above the altar and the seat cushions and window curtains were not installed until 1840 and 1841 respectively (Grashof). Beginning in 1859 and continuing to the present, memorial plaques were placed on the interior walls. An appropriation of \$571.99 in 1862 for an addition to the Chapel is unexplained due to the comparison of a 1839 map and a 1910 floor plan (Grashof).

The Annual Report for 1895 states that "The Cadet Chapel was renovated inside and outside, the upholstering renewed, and the walls, ceilings, and woodwork painted inside and the exterior walls repainted and painted where required."

The change that has most affected the interior appearance is the alteration to the altar, which took place in 1943, 1944 and 1946 (drawings in the Post Engineer's Office). One scheme, showing an arched partition altar wall was either not carried out or later changed to the more enclosed present partition. A 1943 drawing notes that a "plush red covering" was removed from the altar and replaced with wood paneling.

Alterations in the 1950s consisted largely of a basement rehabilitation consisting of wooden partitions, new doors and new tiles.

The latest alterations were those in 1944. These included the replacement of the metal roof and flashing with "Terne" sheetmetal; new double-hung sash with interior storm panes; the repointing of chimneys, arches and quoins; the placement of insulation between ceiling joists; a concrete slab for the basement stairs; and spot lights on the interior.

B. Historical Context:

The following quotation is taken from George S. Pappas' The Cadet Chapel; for a more lengthy history of religion at West Point, see "Religion at West Point" in the Supplemental Material section. For a general historical overview of the Chapel with the physical development of West Point, consult HABS No. NY-5708, Volume 2: "West Point: An Overview of the History and Physical Development of the United States Military Academy."

"The practice of obligatory cadet Sunday worship is almost as old as the Military Academy itself. Prior to the appointment of the first official chaplain in August 1913, visiting clergymen or the superintendent conducted services. The first chaplain, the Reverend Adam Empie, also served as Professor of Geography, History, and Ethics. Moreover he performed the additional duties of treasurer of the Military Academy from 1815 to 1816. There being no chapel at West Point, services were conducted in the mess hall, in class rooms, or, occasionally, out of doors."

Thomas Warner, brother of Henry Warner who bought Constitution Island, was the first chaplain to serve the chapel. Thomas Warner speculated on a land deal which resulted in his brother assuming the mortgage to Constitution Island.

Beginning in 1899 there is discussion of the chapel being inadequate in size. It is included in the plans for expansion. See the quotations from the Annual Report of 1899 and 1902 included in the Supplemental Material section.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Cadet Chapel is architecturally significant as a virtually unaltered Greek Revival non-denominational chapel from the 1830s with an accumulated collection of memorial plaques dating from the 1850s.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in excellent condition except for some water damage in the southwest corner of the building.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building has a rectangular central block with a prostyle portico on the front and a projecting rear chancel. Overall dimensions are 53'-10" x 97'-9". The one story building has a three-bay facade of two niches flanking a central doorway. It has a full basement and an organ loft/balcony at the rear of the nave.
2. Foundations: Stone foundation walls are 3'-0" thick for the outside walls; 4' square stone piers for the columns; and 8" - 18" stone and brick interior walls.
3. Walls: Walls were made of granite laid in a random range ashlar pattern. Dressed granite quoins occupy each corner. Three courses of dressed granite laid in a running bond pattern forms the exposed foundation wall on the exterior. Plastered circular niches rather than windows occupy the facade and rear elevation. Square blank panels are set above each niche and a rectangular blank panel is set above the main doorway.
4. Structural system, framing: Structural systems consist of 22" thick load bearing stone walls, stone vaults and brick arches in the cellar; reinforced concrete floors under the chancel and sacristy; and wood joists under the nave floor. Roof framing is a rafter and purlin system with parallel wooden trusses supported by the interior wooden columns.

5. Porches, porticoes: The facade is dominated by a pedimented wooden portico on a granite base. The Doric Order entablature is supported by paired, fluted columns with paired, engaged pilasters against the wall. The projecting sacristy is without columns and has a simple granite porch without rails.
6. Chimneys: A small, square, brick chimney stack rises above the cornice on each corner of the building. These are vents for a 12" square tile-lined flue that penetrates the wall from cellar to roof.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: There are two principal doorways: the main central aisle doorway on the facade and one opposite serving the sacristy. There is also a cellar doorway just north of the sacristy.

The entrance doorway consists of a circular stone arch springing from stone pilasters. A stone lintel rests above the arch. The bi-valve raised panel wicket doors open within a larger fixed panelled space. The doors are painted black as opposed to the other trim which is painted white and the niches that are painted ochre. A triangular symbol occupies the tympanum of both doorways.

The rear doorway is much simpler, with a projecting keystone and narrow smooth granite surround with blocks projecting at the spring line. The bi-valve doors have raised panels and are also painted black.

- b. Windows: Windows are confined solely to the north and south elevations: five windows each in the main body of the church and one on each side of the sacristy. These are 15-over-15 double-hung sash topped with a fixed, 10 light circular fanlight. Although the fanlights look original, the sash are replacements. Gauged brick forms the jambs and arch for each window.

8. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: The roof shape is low pitch gable hidden behind a balustrade. Its covering is standing-seam tin.
- b. Cornice, balustrade: The portico entablature is a simple Doric order of triglyphs, blank metopes, mutules without guttae and a cornice with a fascia and crown molding. While the entablature height is maintained on the north and south, the entablature and frieze on these elevations are unadorned and the cornice has an added bed molding. On the east and west elevations the entablature height is still maintained but the frieze is perforated for a balustrade composed of alternating balusters and a Greek fret. A hung gutter is attached to a soffit that runs below this balustrade. Downspouts are attached to the wall on the east and west elevations.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: See sketch plan of cellar and principal floors.

2. Stairways: A quarter-turn stairway with winders in the southwest corner leads to the balcony. This has a round wooden handrail and simple turned balusters.
3. Flooring: The cellar floor is cement and the principal floor is wood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The cellar walls are lined with a 5" brick veneer. The principal interior walls and ceiling are plaster. A barrel vault of plaster on metal lath springs from the parallel rows of wooden columns to form the central ceiling. The lower aisle ceiling has a symmetrical arrangement of plaster cornices and coves.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are no original or notable interior doors.
 - b. Windows: The 5'-6" wide windows are set within splayed wall openings with arched tops. Each window has wooden louvers.
6. Decorative features and trim: The most striking decorative features are the 18'-8" wooden corinthian columns and the mural entitled "War and Peace" painted by Professor Robert Weir on the north end of the central barrel vault. Other decorative pieces include: a gold eagle sculpture on a fasces which rests on the altar/sacristry partition; carved friezes and moldings on the paneled face of the balcony; an organ with Gothic detailing; and wooden black marble commemorative tablets and cannons added to the building beginning around 1850.
7. Hardware: There is no original hardware of note.
8. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating: The cellar is vented by wall flues that lead to square chimney stacks. Early photographs show radiators on the wall flanking the altar; 1909 plans for the cellar indicate a boiler and coal storage. Floor registers appear on the 1909 drawings.
 - b. Lighting: Gas-o-liers are attached to the interior columns. Historic photographs, U.S.M.A. Archives, ca. 1908, show two different shades, both of which have been replaced.
 - c. Lift: A mechanical lift in the aisle was probably installed when the Chapel became a mortuary chapel. This lift lowered caskets from the main aisle down into the crypt below where they would remain in winter until the cemetery ground was thawed.
9. Original furnishings: The only original furniture of note are the 18' long wooden pews.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Originally the Cadet Chapel occupied a site between the Old Library and the Old Academic Building. On this site it faced north toward the Plain but when it was moved in 1910 to its present site in the cemetery it was oriented facing south. It now faces the principal cemetery entrance off of Washington Road near its juncture with Ruger Road. To the south, immediately in front of the Chapel, is a circular drive with an Art Nouveau sculpture in its grass center. The cemetery road passes to the east of the building. The building sits very close to cemetery plots on the north, separated only by a narrow gravel drive.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural Drawings: Original drawings are not known to exist. Subsequent measured drawings are in the Facilities Engineer's Office, Directorate of Engineering and Housing, U.S. Military Academy.
- B. Early Views: Early photographs can be found in the U.S. Military Academy Archives and Special Collections. Some of these are reproduced in the Grashof and Lange volumes of this project.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Records, U.S. Military Academy Archives and Special Collections. See bibliographic essay in the Lange volume of this project for a listing of record groups.
2. Secondary and published sources:

Annual Reports, U. S. Military Academy Archives

Grashof, Bethonie C. "Building Analysis and Preservation Guidelines for Category I and Selected Category II Buildings at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York." HABS No. NY-5708.

Robie S. Lange: "West Point: An Overview of the History and Physical Development of the United States Military Academy," HABS No. NY-5708.

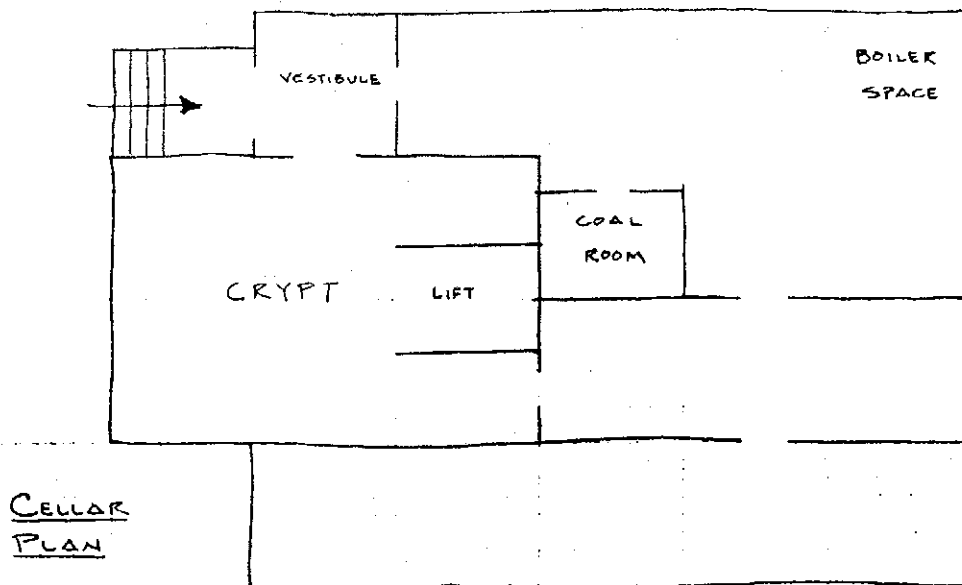
Pappas, George S.: The Cadet Chapel, West Point: Cadet Religious Welfare Board, 1953.

D. Supplemental Material:

1. Sketch Plan
2. Annual Report, 1899
3. Annual Report, 1902
4. George S. Pappas, "Religion at West Point", The Cadet Chapel

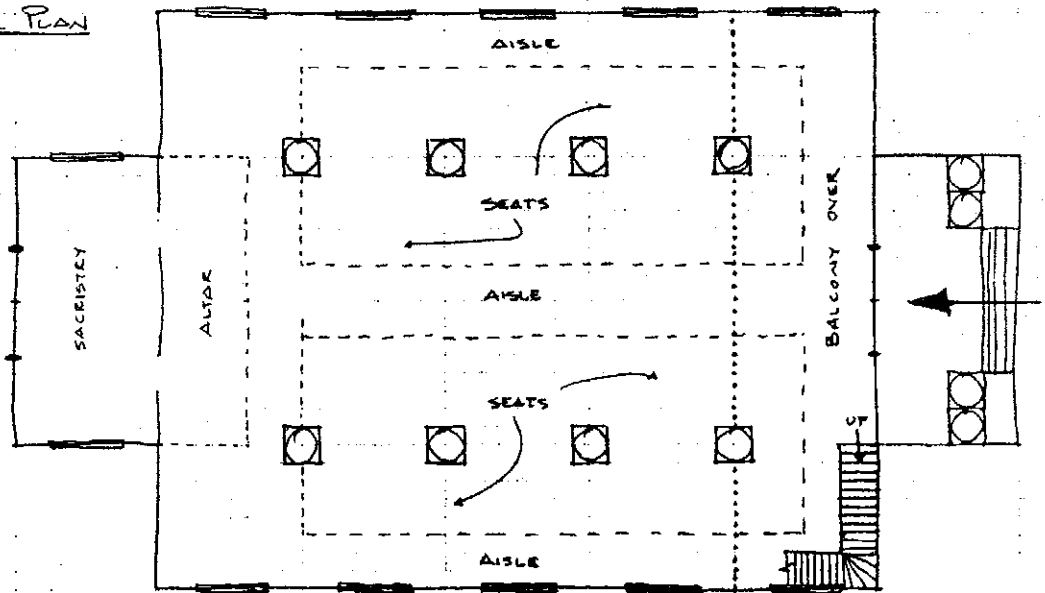
D. Supplemental Material
1. Cadet Chapel, Sketch Plan

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(N.T.S.)

FLOOR PLAN



OLD CADET CHAPEL

U.S.M.A. WEST POINT H.A.B.S. NO. 5708-7.

D. Supplemental Material

U. S. MILITARY ACADEMY - CADET CHAPEL

2. From Annual Report 1899, p. 17

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U. S. Military Academy Archives and Special
Collections

THE CHAPEL

The Chapel is inadequate to the present needs of the institution. With the proposed increase its capacity should be more than doubled. The associations connected with this building make it highly desirable that any increase in the capacity of the building should leave the present structure as nearly intact as possible. The interior is now basilican in form. To double its capacity and preserve this form would unduly lengthen the building and make its proportions very attenuated. The addition of a transept would change its style, but by the addition of a small dome over the intersection of nave and transept the style can be changed to Romanesque and all of the existing structure preserved intact. The apse as it now stands would retire south of the transept, and in order that the rostrum and screen retain their present size and appearance the space on the east and west to the main wall could be used for organ and choir, respectively. I append estimates based upon this modification.

D. Supplemental Material

U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY - CADET CHAPEL

3. From Annual Report, 1902, pp. 54-55 HABS No. NY-5708-7 (page 9)
U. S. Military Academy Archives
and Special Collections

THE CHAPEL

The existing chapel, built in 1837, is a basilican building of rubble masonry with brick window linings, wood cornice, and portico. It seats, under crowded conditions, about 500 people on the main floor and a very few in the organ gallery. There is a square apse screened off with drapery, giving a very restricted and inadequate chancel.

It barely accommodates the cadets, and is wholly inadequate to officers' families, guests, and visitors. Its position occupies the site needed for the new Academy. It is proposed to erect a new chapel on Trophy Point, which in extent is exactly adapted to its size, and in position affords a commanding and convenient location. It is fitting that the new chapel should so far as possible recall the old building in its interior arrangement, and to that end a nave similar in general design to that of its predecessor is suggested, with a transept and apse surmounted by a dome, constituting a structure of a very picturesque character in such a site. This site as seen from the river and plain has no superior in the country, and the building both in interior and exterior finish, should be worthy of it. It should be planned to seat not less than 1,400.

D. Supplemental Material
4. From George S. Pappas,
The Cadet Chapel
U.S. Military Academy
Archives and Special Collections

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"Religion at West Point"

"In 1836, the first Cadet Chapel was erected on the site of the present East Academic Building, next to the Library. The design of the Chapel followed the "classic style" of architecture popular throughout the country during the 1830s. The Chapel often has been referred to as a Roman basilica with a Grecian portico. The Doric columns supporting the low-gabled roof of the porch are Greek in origin while the semi-circular ceiling of the interior and the arches over the windows and doors are of Roman derivation. Above the altar is the mural, "Peace and War", by Robert H. Weir, Professor of Drawing at West Point from 1833 to 1876. Weir also painted the famous "Embarkation of the Pilgrims" in the rotunda of the Capitol in Washington. Around the walls of the Chapel are black marble tablets bearing in gold the name, rank, and dates of birth and death of an outstanding general officer of the Revolutionary War. In a inconspicuous place in the rear of the Chapel is a plaque which carries only the rank and date of birth of Benedict Arnold, who attempted to betray West Point to the British. The plaque pays tribute to his outstanding service in the invasion of Canada and at the Battle of Saratoga; the deletion of his name and death date indicate his perfidy. Memorials to heroes of the War of 1812 and the Mexican War are also located in the old Chapel.

The Chapel continued in use until after the present Chapel was completed. Then, on Sunday, June 12, 1910, the last regular service was held in the building. The service began with music by the Military Academy Band, followed by the saying of the Apostles' Creed, a prayer, and the Doxology. The Reverend Herbert Shipman, former chaplain, delivered the address. This was followed by what has since been regarded as the high point of the service, the singing of a new song with words by Chaplain Shipman and music by W. Franke Harling. The song, with its magnificent arrangement by the present organist, Mr. F. C. Mayer, has become the hymn of the Corps of Cadets. It is appropriate that its first appearance was at the closing of the old Chapel and the dedication of the new. After this premier singing of "The Corps", the old Chapel was officially closed and the congregation moved to the New Chapel on the hill above.

The consecration service began with the procession hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers", and the reading of the official order of the Superintendent to dedicate the Chapel. The Chaplain, Rev. Edward S. Travers, then offered prayers of dedication. These were followed by the twenty-fourth Psalm, the lessons for the day, and appropriate choral music. The Benediction concluded the simple service.

The old Chapel was moved, stone by stone, to its present location in the cemetery in 1911. Today, it is used for services for Jewish cadets each Sunday, for weddings during June Week, for Sunday School, and for funeral services as required. The old Chapel is one of four chapels to be found at West Point. The Catholic Chapel of the Most Holy Trinity, erected in 1900, was patterned after an English Gothic Church, erected by Carthusian monks. Two Catholic priests administer to the needs of Catholic cadets and of Catholic officers, enlisted men, and their families. The fourth West Point Chapel, the Post Chapel, is a simple red brick building located in the north sector of the post.

In the one hundred and forty years since the Reverend Adam Empie was appointed the first Cadet Chaplain, twenty-one chaplains have taken care of the spiritual needs of the Corps of Cadets. Four of these men were later consecrated bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church: Charles P. McIlvaine; Herbert Shipman; Arthur B. Kingsolving, II; and John B. Walthour. West Point has changed greatly since Adam Empie said evening prayer with the Corps of Cadets formed around him in a hollow square. The Corps has increased in size many times; new buildings have been erected; thousands of cadets have been graduated to serve their country in all parts of the world. Wherever they are, these graduates remember the reverence and the sincerity of the men who often led them in their religious devotions."

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation is part of a multi-year project sponsored by the National Park Service and the United States Military Academy, explained in HABS No. NY-5708, Volume 1, "Methodology". This written documentation was prepared by Travis C. McDonald, Jr., architectural historian, in 1982-1985 based on fieldwork conducted in 1982.